

*The Use and Excellency of Vocal Music, in  
Public Worship.*

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S E R M O N

Preached at an occasional Lecture, in Lexington.

*Appointed to promote and encourage the divine use  
of vocal Music, more especially in.*

Public Worship,

On Wednesday April 25. 1770.

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B Y

JONAS CLARKE, A. M. \*

Pastor of the Church in Lexington.

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*Praise ye the Lord : For it is good to sing praises unto our  
God ; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely. Psalm 147. 1.*

*I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly  
of the upright, and in the Congregation. Psalm 111. 1.*

*I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live : I will sing  
praise unto my God while I have any being. Psalm 103. 33.*

*I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the under-  
standing also. 1 Cor. 14, 15.*

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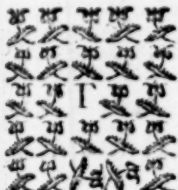
# The Use and Excellency of vocal Music, in Public Worship.

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## P S A L M XLVII. 6. 7.

*Sing praises to GOD, Sing praises ; Sing praises unto  
our King, sing praises : For GOD is the King  
of all the Earth, Sing ye praises with under-  
standing.*

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HAT there is a Deity, or a supreme Being possessed of all possible excellencies and perfections ;—that he is the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the first cause and last end of all things ; or that he is the creator, preserver, governor and sovereign disposer of all things, in heaven and earth, are truths, which the light of reason and revelation conspire to evince, truths generally received in the christian world, and truths (I trust) which are not called in question by any, who profess to believe and receive the word of God and gospel of Christ.

EVERY one, that acknowledges the being and perfections of God, his power and providence, and his sovereign right to dispose of all his creatures and all his works, according to his own good pleasure, must, of necessary consequence, acknowledge his sovereign right to every rational expression of religious worship, homage and adoration, from all  
intelligent

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intelligent beings, in heaven and earth. *Angels* and *Men* are jointly obliged hereto, and though they cannot, hereby, *be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself*; \* yet, as in this way, both *Angels* and *Men* may express their entire dependence upon him, and obligations to him, as their creator, preserver, benefactor, sovereign and judge, it is their indispensable duty to *bow before the LORD and kneel before their Maker*, † to worship and adore him. In this way, may they glorify him, as in this way, a gracious God 's pleased to account himself glorified by them.

WITH respect to the *Angels*, and the heavenly host, those bright intelligences, who inhabit the celestial abodes and continually surround the throne of God, it is not for us to say, with any real certainty, neither is it easy for us to conceive, in what manner they discharge this part of their duty to God; though it is certain, beyond all dispute, that they do worship him: Because it is expressly said, in sacred scripture, *that the host of heaven worshippeth him*. ‡ This was undoubtedly, the service intended in that passage of sacred writ, wherein it is expressly said, *That the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of GOD shouted for joy*. § And this is expressly declared to have been the fact, at the birth of the redeemer; upon which glorious occasion, *there appeared a multitude of the heavenly host, with the Angel that came to the shepherds, adoring and praising God, saying, glory to GOD in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men* ||— But clearly to comprehend, and fully to understand,

\* Job 22. 2.

† Psalm 95. 6.

‡ Neh. 9. 6.

§ Job. 38. 7.

|| Luk. 2. 13, 14.



understand, the manner, in which these sacred and delightful acts of devotion are performed, is not for us in this state of imperfection. For the desired satisfaction, we must wait, till we are admitted to join them, in those heavenly and delightful services—*till we come to see as we are seen, and know as we are known.\**—In the mean time, we may assure ourselves, from divine authority, that *they cease not day and night*, to pay their religious homage to God, to worship and adore that glorious being, from whom they derived their existence, by whom they are preserved in life, and upon whom they depend for felicity and blessedness.

THE duty, as well as privilege of mankind, in this matter, is not less evident, being clearly deducible, by the light of reason, from the nature of things, and fully pointed out both as to matter and manner, by express revelation from heaven. The divine commands and instructions, written on the tables of our hearts, and explained and enforced by the writings of divine inspiration, relative to our duty and obligations, to worship and adore the God, that made, preserves, supports and governs us, are too plain and explicit to be drawn in question, by any that have, believe and receive the scriptures of truth. It is but rational and just, that we should acknowledge and adore the perfection and excellencies of that glorious being, to whom we are indebted for existence, upon whom we depend for preservation and support in life, and to whom we may look and in whom we may safely trust, for the bestowment of every blessing, necessary to our well-being

\* 1 Cor. 13. 12.

being in the present world, or to a state of perfect felicity and glory, of which we are capable, to eternal ages, in the world to come.—It is but rational and just, that the *God in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways, should be glorified* \* by us; and that we should worship and adore him, and, in every rational way possible, express the deep sense we have of our dependence upon and obligations to him.

VARIOUS are the ways, in which these religious acknowledgments may be, and are, acceptably made unto God; both *internally* and *externally*. As, in private, in publick—seperately, by individuals,—socially, by societies, or assemblies of men, adoring and worshipping God, and giving him that glory which is due to his name.

*Internally*, this is done, and this important duty is acceptably discharged, by the devotion of the heart, or the unreserved dedication of the soul to God; and by cultivating a deep, constant and grateful sense of our indebtedness, dependence and obligations.—Herein does the essence of piety towards God consist.—Hence the intrinsic excellency,—hence the vital influence of religion takes its rise. Agreeable to that sacred requisition—*My son give me thine heart.* † In this, our blessed LORD makes the sum of religion consist. Hence, when one asked him saying, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.* This is the first and great commandment.” ‡ Without the sincere affections of the

\* Dan. 5. 23. † Prov. 23. 26. ‡ Mat. 22. 36. 37. & 38.

the heart, without the unreserved devotion of the soul, no acts of religion can be well-pleasing in the sight of that God, *who searches the heart,—who cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked*—Unless the heart be engaged,—unless religion begins, takes root in, and rise from the heart, however showy, or splended it may appear, in the outward acts, pretences or professions, it is all in vain—no better than *sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.* \* —But not to digress—

*Externally,* This privilege is improved, and this duty discharged, by such acts of religion and worship, as, by the light of reason, appear in their own nature suited, or by immediate and express revelation are appointed, to represent the inward sentiments of the heart and the internal devotion of the soul towards God, as becomes his creatures, dependent upon and accountable to him. So far, therefore, as the outward acts of religion, and religious services and institutions, are attended upon and discharged with this view,—so far as they are truly expressive of the real sentiments and devotion of the heart and soul to God; so far (and no farther) are they acceptable and well-pleasing in his sight.—Externals in religion are but the *garb*, or *shell*—The love of the heart, the sincere devotion of the soul, is the substance, and what is chiefly and ultimately to be attended to; but the other is not to be neglected.—Both are to have a proper regard, according to the place they hold in the scale of importance. Neither are to be omitted; though it is beyond dispute, that the less is to give place to the greater, when brought into comparison.—When our

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\* 1 Cor. 13. 1.

bleſſed LORD ſaw the punctilious regard the *Scribes* and *Phariſees* paid, to ſome external rites and ceremonies of their religion, while their groſs neglect of many things of higheſt importance to virtue and godlineſs, and vital religion, was too notorious to be concealed, he ſeverely reprov'd them, ſaying, "*Wo unto you Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites ; For ye pay tithe of mint, anniſe and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith : Theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*" \* This paſſage is evidently applicable to the point in view, and exhibits the leſſon, we have endeavour'd to ſuggeſt, in too legible characters to need any comment.

THERE are a variety of ways, in which the devotion of the heart, to a glorious God, may be fitly exerciſed, profitably cultivated and ſtrongly expreſſed, in the external acts of religion ; either diſcretionally, according to the beſt light of our own minds, or in obedience to ordinances and inſtitutions of divine appointment. But, in general, all religious acts and external ſervices of this nature, may be conſidered as reducible to, or virtually included in, or couched under, theſe two moſt expreſſive branches of devotion, prayer and praiſe. Both *prayer* and *praiſe* equally ſuppoſe and include in them, a full and unreſerved acknowledgment of the Deity and adoration of his perfections. Both are alike expreſſive of our dependence upon God and of our obligations to him. And by whatever devotional acts, our deſires and grateful acknowledgments are expreſſed, in both prayer and praiſe, our truſt, fear, love, gratitude, hope, and even all the

\* Mat. 23. 23.



the pious and religious affections, towards the glorious Being whom we worship and adore, are truly engaged and devoutly expressed. In a word, prayer and praise alike include and express, (when attended aright) a filial acknowledgment of our intire subjection to divine government, and the righteous disposals of a wise providence in the present state, and of our accountableness to God, at last, as our rightful sovereign and final judge. These sentiments ought always to be kept in mind and deeply impressed on the heart, as entering into the nature of devotion, and as essentially necessary to render devotional acts and services well pleasing to God.

*Prayer and Praise*, as they are emphatically the two grand constituent parts of religious worship, or devotion, and as they are jointly expressive of all the pious affections towards God, are very frequently, if not always joined together, in acts of homage and religious addresses to him. Agreeably, an eminent apostle, who well understood the nature and obligations of religion, and especially of devotion, in our addresses to God, expressly enjoins, that we “be careful for nothing: But in *every thing* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let our requests be made known unto God.” \* So that it may fitly be said, that prayer and praise do, for the most part, if not always, involve one another in the same acts of devotion. Are we requesting the bestowment of any needed blessings, a grateful sense of divine goodness already experienced, is not only becoming our character as dependent creatures, and petitioners, but also a good argument of our hope and trust in God, as able and ready to do us good; and,

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\* Phil. 4. 6.



at the same time essentially necessary, as a qualification to render us accepted of God, in our supplications, and meet for the reception of mercies requested. In this way, past mercies, of which the people of God have a grateful sense, are often pled with good success, as an argument for granting the favours they seek. Numberless have been the instances of this, recorded for our instruction and encouragement, in the sacred pages.—On the other hand, are we expressing our grateful acknowledgements, for blessings received, and giving of thanks at the remembrance of his goodness and grace, to renew the acknowledgment of our dependence upon God, and devoutly to implore the continuance of his providence and blessing, and earnestly to seek his grace and assistance, to a wise improvement of his favours, is, at once, to express the sincerity of our desires in praising his name, and the ardour of our souls to make such returns, of love and obedience, as, in consequence of his goodness, he has a right to expect. Thus to offer praise, is to glorify God.

HOWEVER, though *prayer* and *praise* are thus interwoven, and practically speaking, can scarcely be separated, in acts of devotion; yet they may be, and are justly distinguished, in theory and speculation, and may fitly be considered, as expressive of the general and main design or devotional acts, to which they are applied: The former as denominating an act of worship, as being of the nature of supplication and request, for favours needed; and the latter, as denoting an act of homage, as being of the nature of gratitude and thankfulness, for blessings received. In either, and in both, when done in true devotion, and from the heart, as the divine perfection

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tions are acknowledged and adored, God is pleased to accept his sincere worshippers, and account himself glorified.—It is the *latter* of these (tho' not to the exclusion of the *former*) to which our attention is called, upon this occasion, and which is, more especially, the subject of our text and the Psalm before us.

WHAT particular occasion this Psalm was wrote upon—whether to celebrate some signal victory, over the enemies of God's people—or to express the joy of God's people, upon the bringing the ark of the covenant of God, into the city of David, which was done with great pomp, solemnity and rejoicings ; or whether it is to be considered as prophetic of the kingdom of Christ, the glory of the church, in the gospel day ; to usher in which, our blessed LORD, in glorious triumph, *ascended on high, led captivity captive, and received gifts for men ;* \* (I say) whether it is to be considered, as referring to either of these, or any other remarkable events, which the psalmist might have immediately in view, is not easy for us to determine, at this distance of time. Neither is a certainty, in this case, of any special importance to our present purpose. For be the immediate occasion of it, what it will, the subject, and practical use of it, to God's church and people, in every age, are the same, and will be so to the end of time. It is an exhortation to praise the LORD, in several acts expressive of this part of devotion. Particularly, by *clapping of hands, shouting, and singing*.—"O clap your hands, all ye people, shout unto God with the voice of triumph : For the LORD most high is terrible ; he is a great King

King over all the earth.—*Sing praises to God, sing praises ; Sing praises unto our King, sing praises : For God is the King of all the earth, sing ye praises with understanding."*

*Praise*, is expressive of that part of devotion, in which we celebrate the divine perfections, in the various displays of them, in the works of nature, providence and grace ; in which God's people greatly acknowledge, and particularly celebrate, any special favours and blessings, they have received, and and in which they express their faith, hope and trust in God, and make it their concern to render to the LORD the glory due to his name. Agreeable to that most pathetic wish of the holy Psalmist, so often mentioned in the hundred and seventh Psalm—"Oh that men would praise the LORD, for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men" !

VARIOUS have been the ways in which God's people, in the several ages of the church and the world, have expressed their grateful acknowledgments to him and endeavoured to praise his name : And various have been the religious rites, institutions, means and acts attended upon and used, by the saints, to excite and assist in this part of devotion.

As to the first ages of the church, we have reason to suppose, as sacred history is in a great measure silent upon this subject, that the saints and people of God, under the common guidance of the blessed spirit, were left very much, to their own discretion, both as to means of exciting and manner of performing this part of their duty and this branch of divine worship. And as we have no reason to suppose, that men of various tempers, characters and circumstances,

circumstances, would hit upon the same methods of expressing their reverence for the Deity, and gratitude for his favours, it is natural to conclude, that societies, families, and even individuals, for themselves, pitched upon those means and methods, which, according to their best judgment and discretion, appeared most suitable, and most expressive of their gratitude and thankfulness, for the blessings of heaven, with which they were indulged. While there were no standing ordinances, or institutions, of divine appointment, relative to the forms of worship; and so long as it was discretionary, in what way, to express their devotion to God, it was of little importance, what measures were adopted, in religious services, so that the heart was found sincere, in devout ascriptions of glory and praise to his name. Accordingly their grateful acknowledgments were expressed, sometimes by serious and solemn addresses to God, as the author and giver of blessings enjoyed—sometimes by costly sacrifices, offered upon altars, dedicated to the service of God—sometimes by religious festivals, attended in honour to his name, and sometimes otherways, as his sincere worshippers thought proper, or as occasion required.

WHEN God was pleased to chuse a people to himself, and bring his church into a covenant state, as under the jewish œconomy, he took the direction of these matters more immediately into his own hands; and appointed, both as to rites and ordinances, and time and manner of attending them, by his express instructions and directions; as in the services of the *Tabernacle* and *Temple*, enjoin'd by the mosaic institution. By this dispensation, which was expressly given by divine authority, days were appointed



appointed for these important purposes, annually to be observed, as festivals in honour to God, and to shew forth his praise. By the same dispensation, sacrifices were directed to, and rites, of various kinds were instituted, to be attended upon by the people of God, as expressive of the gratitude of their hearts, and of that internal devotion, which he required and expected, in return for his blessings indulged them. And, as expressive of their joy in the LORD, and as suited to excite and assist their devotion, in praising their God, upon these and all other joyful occasions, several things were admitted, under that dispensation, into the worship and services of the sanctuary;—such as *feasting, shouting, blowing of trumpets, clapping of hands, leaping for joy, and even dancing*—as *David before the ark of the LORD, when it was brought up from the house of Oben-edom, to the city of David with gladness,—with shouting and the sound of the trumpet* \* In a word, by divine direction, or, at least, by divine permission, God's people admitted into the divine service, in external acts of worship, almost all acts and exercises, which in themselves were decent, manly and becoming, and which were suited to excite or assist in devotion, or expressive of the pious affections towards him.

*Music* also was introduced, for the same sacred purposes, into the services of the sanctuary, and improved to a divine use, in worshipping of God, and to praise his name. *Instruments of music* were prepared, and men skilled in the use of them, were appointed, to this delightful service. Thus holy David in preparing for the worship of God, in the Temple,  
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\* 2 Sam. 6. 12, 14, 15.



and in appointing those who were to wait on the service, tells us, that there were no less than four thousand, that praised the LORD, with the instruments which he made to praise therewith. \*

AMONG the numerous instruments of music, appropriated to a divine use, in the services of the sanctuary and in the worship of God, the *Harp* and the *Psaltery*, are frequently mentioned : But by what may be collected from the scripture account, the *Organ* was of most antient date, and the leading instrument, in the divine use of instrumental music. And there is some reason to suppose, the *Organ* to have been in use, even in the earliest ages of the church. †

BUT, then, it is not to be understood, that *instrumental music*, even the music of the *psaltery*, *harp*, or *organ*, however pleasant and harmonious, were ever introduced into a divine use, in the worship of God, to prevent, or exclude *vocal music*, or the voices of men, from being employed in praising the LORD. His design was, evidently, rather to assist, than to prevent, the people of God, in using their tongues to praise his great and glorious name. Whatever ingenuity may have been discovered, in musical instruments, of human structure ; and however sweet and harmonious their sounds, when touched by a skilful hand ; yet, certain it is, No Organs are equal to those of divine construction ;—no music so pleasant in itself—none so pleasant in the ears of the LORD our God, as the voices of the saints and people, tuned to sacred harmony and regularly employed in celebrating his praise. Above all, therefore, *Singing the High Praises of the LORD*, seemed to constitute

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\* 1 Chron. 23. 5. † vide Gen. 4. 21.

stitute a most essential part of this religious service, in the sanctuary, and was more earnestly and frequently inculcated, and more generally attended to, in publick assemblies, for divine worship, as what greater numbers might be personally engaged in, and as better suited, than any other part of divine worship, at once to express, excite, assist and inflame their pious affections, religious zeal and heavenly devotion.

A gracious God, with smiles of approbation, in his providence, countenanced and encouraged his people, to make proficiency in a service, so pleasing to him and so profitable and delightful to themselves. His countenance and encouragement, to his church and people, in this matter, were clearly discovered, in a variety of instances. The divine approbation and acceptance of so excellent a service, were peculiarly manifest, as under the special direction of heaven, various steps were taken, from time to time, by the leaders of the people and the most eminent of his servants, to bring this part of divine worship to its greatest perfection; and to render it most engaging to men, and most useful to the important purposes of piety and devotion.

To assist his people in praising his name, and to prepare their minds with subjects and themes worthy his praise, an all-condescending God inspires a number of his servants and prophets, with a concern for his honour and zeal for his service and glory, in this part of his worship, and sets their tongues and pens a going.—Under the immediate and powerful direction of his blessed spirit, the poetic numbers flow, in most exalted strains of gratitude, adoration  
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and praise.—The glories of the Deity, the unchangeableness of his nature, the excellency of his perfections, the majesty of his kingdom, the wisdom of his government, the greatness of his goodness and the riches of his grace, as clearly displayed in the works of nature, providence and redemption, are some of the themes to which their attention is called, as suited to excite the gratitude of men and assist them to celebrate the praises of their God.—Psalms, hymns, and heavenly songs, are thus composed for the use of the church; and in matter and measure, happily prepared for the service of the sanctuary: And, at the same time, in number and variety of subjects, wisely calculated for the use of God's people, upon every occasion and in every circumstance, that did, or might occur to them in life. So that a gracious God, has not only invited his people to do delightful a duty, but put words into their mouth, to celebrate his praise.

BUT not enough, that God's people were thus furnished with suitable subjects and matter of praise, that his praises might be sung in a manner worthy so exalted a theme, the utmost care is taken to promote so important a service. Inspired with a pious zeal for the glory of God, and knowing it to be of no small importance to the honour of his name, in promoting true devotion, in this part of his worship, that the *music* itself should be decent, regular and engaging, the chief Rulers and Fathers of the people are not wanting, to use their utmost endeavours, as well as influence and authority, to encourage, cultivate and promote so pleasing, so useful an art, for so important a purpose.—In a word, their aim is, that the harmony of Zion might, at once, express the devotion

on of her children, and excite them to aspire to sing, in higher accents and still more exalted strains of praise.

ALL, indeed, cannot be supposed, to have had the gift of, the *ear* and *voice* for *music*; tho' all might sincerely join in the devotion, intended and expressed in this part of the worship of God's house: But yet, that so useful an institution should want no assistance, to make it as general, and extensively beneficial, as possible, peculiar pains were taken in the church, both to find and to instruct such as had talents, adapted for this purpose, and a genius for music, and to prepare them to lead and assist, in the services of the sanctuary; to the end, that in a manner, most regular, correct and harmonious, and best becoming the house and worship of God, this part might be performed.—That God's people in general, even the *whole congregation*, might be led and assisted in singing praise to their King and their God—That all might be enabled, in a good measure at least, agreeable to the direction in the text to *sing with understanding* in the manner, as well as matter of the song—and, at the same time, catch the attention, charm the ear, awaken the affections, engage the hearts and excite the devotion of all around.

To this purpose *David*, the *sweet singer* of *Israel*, had his *musicians*—his *Chief Musician*,\* not only upon the *Psaltery*, the *Harp* and the *Organ*, but also (undoubtedly) in this part of divine worship, in which his heart was so deeply engaged, in which his tongue was so frequently employed, and in which his soul was greatly delighted. Had he *four thousand*

\* Neh. 12. 46.



*and* appointed to praise the LORD, with the musical instruments, which he had prepared for this purpose, a much greater number are often called upon by him, to sing to the LORD, and with their voices, skilfully modulated to harmonious sound, to praise his great and glorious name :— Yea, he frequently calls upon all, of every character, among the people of God, to engage in so rational, so delightful a duty.

To the same end, *Solomon*, his son, in the *Æra* of whose reign, the *Church* and *State* of God's chosen people arrived at the summit of their glory, and the best part of whose time, after he came to the throne, by divine appointment, was employed in building the *Temple*, and appointing the worship and services of the sanctuary, took care of this part of worship, and appointed his *Men Singers* and *Women Singers*; as also, *and more especially*, for the temple service and the worship of God, *the Levites, which were Singers*, were appointed, *as one, to make one sound to be heard when they lifted up their voice—and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth forever.\** And there is good reason to suppose, that this order continued, in the service of the temple, so long as the worship of God was therein continued and observed, according to the divine appointment.

WHEN *Ezra the Scribe of the law of the God of heaven*, † and *Nebemiah the governor of Judah*, ‡ upon the return of the captivity of God's people, were engaged in re-establishing the jewish polity and government, in rebuilding the temple, in restoring God's covenant people to a church state, and in re-  
viving

\* 2 Chron. 5. 12, 13. † Ezra 7. 21. ‡ Neh. 5. 14.



viving the worship and ordinances of religion, agreeable to the direction of heaven, under that dispensation, they made it their care, to revive and encourage this part of divine worship, in particular ; as an institution of no small importance to the true worship of God, and as what, even in that broken state of the church, could by no means be omitted — Yea, so much in earnest were these servants of God, to have this part of the temple service restored, as an excellent help to religion and as a part of worship, that they made it their concern, when about to return to *Jerusalem*, with the people, carefully to collect both the *Singing Men and Singing Women*, who were to be found, among the captives scattered in the nations, whether they had been driven. And though they were few, in comparison with the whole number of God's people that returned ; yet so essential, did they esteem this part of divine worship, to the services of religion, that they were appointed to lead and assist therein : And to enable them to improve, in that skill, in harmony and music, which was necessary to the faithful discharge of the duty appointed them, they had daily portions assigned and given them, for their support, according to the commandment of the LORD, \* by *David* and *Solomon* his Son.

BUT this is not all : Further to show the reasonableness and propriety of this method of praising God, and our obligations hereto, it may be observed, that many of the psalms and hymns, in sacred writ, composed by the inspired penmen, for the use of God's church and people, in this part of divine worship, are

\* Vid. *Ezra* 2 65.    *Neh.* 7, 67, 11, 23, 12, 45, 46, 47.

are conceived in terms suited to remind all of their duty, in this respect: And some of them contain express injunctions and exhortations hereto. —“It is a good thing”, says the Psalmist “to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most high.” \* “Praise ye the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.” “Praise ye the LORD: For it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely.” † For these and other important reasons, the holy Psalmist resolves, saying, “I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise unto my God, while I have any being” ‡ And, in full proof of what has been advanced, with regard to this important branch of divine worship, the psalm before us, which is an exhortation to praise the LORD, but most directly the words of our text, may be added, which contain the nature and authority of a command.—*Sing praises to God, sing praises; Sing praises unto our King, sing praises: For GOD is the King of all the earth, sing ye praises with understanding.*

HERE the duty, of which we have been speaking, is exhorted to and enjoined, in words too plain to be misunderstood—too clear to admit of dispute, or need any comment.—The reason with which the injunction is enforced upon us, that the glorious Being, to whom we are exhorted to sing praises, is our God and King—and the King of all the earth, or sovereign of the world, is both clear and conclusive, easy to be conceived of, and universally binding. For surely no one will draw in question his obligations

\* Psalm 92. 1, 2. 111. 1. † Psal. 147. 1. ‡ Pl. 104. 33.

obligations to God, in either of the characters here mentioned ; or the reasonableness of ascribing to him the glory and praise that are justly his due. And as to the manner in which this duty is to be performed, it is here represented concisely and expressively. We are to sing praises *with understanding*. That is, *intelligently*, with regard to ourselves, as well knowing, or entering into the spirit of the matter and subject of what we sing, and whereby the devotion of our hearts is expressed ; and also, as being acquainted with the manner of the heavenly song, and those modulations of the voice, and modes of singing, which are decent and becoming devotion and praise : — *Intelligibly*, with respect to others, both as to matter and manner of the divine songs, in and by which our devotion to God is expressed. — Herein improving, both hymns and tunes, composed for general use, and conforming ourselves to some standing rules and measures, in both these respects, which are or may be, easily known to others, with whom we worship, and who join us in our public expressions of gratitude to God. Thus we shall, like *the Levites, the singers in God's church of old*, (as abovementioned) *as one, make one*, or the same delightful sound, of music and harmony, to be heard, when *we lift up our voices to praise the LORD* : — And in this way, like the saints above, the door is open for thousands and thousands, to join in the same acts of devotion, to speak the same things both *intelligently* to themselves, and *intelligibly* to each other, and with one heart and with one voice, to praise the LORD.

“ *THUS saints on earth may join their songs,  
like angels round the throne :  
Though thousand thousands are their tongues ;  
yet all their joys are one*”.

SHOULD it be said, that singing to the LORD, or singing his praise, is a rite or ceremony peculiar to the *legal* or *mosaic* dispensation; and that consequently, it shared the same fate with other ceremonial rites, upon the introduction of the gospel: It may be answered—That, to prove, that this is a way of expressing our devotion to God and gratitude for his favours, which is well pleasing to him, under the *gospel*, as well as under the *law*;—we need only say, that our blessed LORD, when upon earth, with his disciples, worshipped God, in this way—and by his example, manifested his approbation of it and taught us our duty. \*

FURTHER to satisfy ourselves, if we think this an insufficient warrant for us, in this matter; it may be served, that the apostles, with whom, our LORD, when he ascended up to heaven, left the immediate care of the church, undoubtedly received it in this light.—One apostle expressly exhorts, to the *singing of psalms*, as expressive of our sacred joy in, and gratitude to God. † And another, for our example and instruction, tells us how this duty should be attended—even as other acts of devotion,—*with the spirit and with the understanding also*. ‡

It hence appears, that as *singing praise* to God, as a part of divine worship, is not so novel an institution, as to be deemed an unjustifiable innovation in the church: So it is not of so antient standing, as to be out of date, or abolished.—Saints under the gospel are equally obliged and encouraged hereto, as under the law: And it is a peculiar glory of the gospel age, that——

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\* Mat. 26. 30. † Jam. 5. 13. ‡ 1 Cor. 14, 15.



"*The christian church does now unite,  
The songs of Moses and the Lamb*".

*Music*, in itself, when well performed, when the voices are good, and the harmony regular and correct, has a powerful influence upon the ear, the affections, the hearts of mankind,.—The effects, which have been justly attributed to the power and charms of music, in a variety of instances,, have been truly great and astonishing. As, when *David played skilfully on the harp, the evil spirit departed from Saul* ;\* so, in many instances, the *mechanical* effects of music, vocal, or instrumental, have been equally surprising and wonderful—Diseases, that have defied the power of *medicine* and baffled the *physicians's* skill, have not been able to resist its charms.—And if the best accounts do not deceive us, in some cases, it is the best, the only remedy.—Poisons are expelled, senses restored, and even life itself has often been saved, by the powerful energy and reviving charms of music.†—To say the least, it must be allowed, from what every one, who has an ear and taste for music, must frequently experience in himself, that it has a natural and most happy tendency, to soften the roughness of our spirits, to calm the passions, and to compose our minds, and thus to prepare us for hearing and receiving instruction, and for meditation, contemplation and acts of devotion.

When *music*, therefore, is well adapted and applied to a *divine use*, it can scarcely fail of having a proportionably

\* 1 Sam. 16. 23.

† A remarkable proof of this, we have, in the only effectual remedy for the Bite of the *Tarantula* ; which is chiefly and generally effected by music.



portionably good effect, to the purpose of our edification — When such compositions ; such *Psalms*, *Hymns*, and *spiritual Songs*, as, in themselves, breathe the true spirit of religion, and are well adapted, at once, to lead, assist, excite and express the devotion of the heart and soul to our God and King, are set to music ; and the parts of music are well adapted to the sentiments therein expressed, and well performed ; it is not easy to conceive, the powerful influence it will have upon us, or the happy effects, it will have a natural tendency to produce. — The attention is roused, the passions are composed, the affections are engaged, the devotion is enlivened, and the *whole soul* is sweetly drawn forth into the exercise of gratitude, and in most devout acknowledgments of praise to God. Our hearts are disposed to receive the great truths of religion, our minds are prepared to digest and improve the instructions we receive, and thus our faith is confirmed, our love increased, our trust encouraged, our hope strengthened, a more endeared intimacy and communion with God established, more lasting impressions are made upon us, and a more solid foundation laid for the flourishing growth of all the virtues and graces of the divine life, which are to the praise and glory of God.

Do we consider it, then, as a way pointed out by God, in his word, as well as rational and natural in itself, to express our devotion to him : — Do we view it as a suitable method, of expressing all the pious affections of the soul, to that God, to whom we are indebted for life and favour, and upon whom we depend for every blessing, it must appear a most rational and delightful part of religious worship — And more especially, will it appear a duty most engaging and

and obliging, if to these things we add, that this is a way, in which, a gracious God is pleased, not only to admit his sincere worshippers to a blessed nearness of communion with himself, but also to account himself glorified, by the devotion and adoration of his people so expressed. For he is expressly said, not only to be delighted in, but even to *inhabit the praises of his Israel.* \*

God is our creator, preserver, benefactor, redeemer and king ;—in him is all our hope —Is it not just, that we should seek his face, and sing his praise? Is it not right, that we should, with our voices, in loudest accents of gratitude, ascribe the glory that is due to his name?—and is it not altogether reasonable, that we should make it our concern and earnest endeavour, not only to be sincere in our devotion, but in the external acts, to shew forth his praise, in a manner worthy his great and glorious name, and becoming our characters as intelligent creatures—to *sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also.*—Surely it become us then to be upon our guard, least we bring the torn, the lame and sick for a sacrifice, in this part of divine worship,—Should we thus approach the LORD with unhallowed lips and the *hoarse accents* of irregularity and confusion, pretend to sing to his praise (when we have the means of being better instructed) would not a justly incensed God, challenge us, as he did his people of old, saying—*who hath required this at your hands?—If I be a Father, where is mine honour? And if I be a Master, where is my fear?* \*

In

\* Psalm 22. 3.

† Isa. 1. 12. Mal. 1. 6.

IN a word : To *sing praises* to our God and King, is a duty which we owe to him, in consequence of our relation to him, as his creatures, created, preserved and redeemed by him, dependent upon him and accountable to him—a duty of express divine appointment—a duty, to which we are obliged by every engaging argument—a duty rational and natural in itself, and wisely adapted to excite, assist and express our devotion—a duty in which we may have communion with the saints on earth and angels in heaven—and a duty, in a due attendance upon which we may, by the divine blessing, begin the work of heaven upon earth, have some ravishing fore-tastes of the joys of the blessed, and be furthered in our preparations for the more exalted services of God's temple above, and rendered meet to sing, in more exalted strains, the high praises of God and the Lamb, in the paradise of the LORD, forever and ever!—Well might the *holy Psalmist*, then in full belief of the use, excellence and importance of this delightful service, exhort and enjoin, as in words before us—*Sing praises to GOD, sing praises : sing praises unto our King, sing praises : For GOD is the King of all the earth, sing ye praises with understanding.*

UPON the whole, and to draw towards a close : What has been said may fitly be improved, to excite all to the exercise of greater care and concern, than ever, to a right discharge of our duty, in *singing praise* to the LORD;—to consider it as a part of divine worship, and to attend upon it in such a manner, as shall be more to his glory and our own edification. Several things, suggested in and deducible from the preceeding discourse, are particularly worthy our special notice and serious attention.

FIRST,

FIRST, we are taught the great condescension and goodness of God, in permitting us, sinful, unworthy creatures, to approach his presence, to worship, adore and praise his great and glorious name :and especially, that he is pleased, not only to accept, but also to be well pleased with, and to account himself glorified by, the sincere services of his people, in *singing praise* to his name.—It is condescension in the majesty of heaven, to behold the things that are done therein, to receive the worship, adoration and praises of the heavenly host—well may we then with grateful wonder, cry out—*LORD, what is man, that thou art mindful of him ; or the children of men, that thou hast any regard unto them !*—Often let us reflect upon this amazing instance of the goodness and condescension of our God and king ; and as often let our souls be humbled within us, that we have been no more affected with a sense of the greatness of the privilege we have so long enjoyed and so greatly abused.—And let our past neglect and abuse of so high a privilege, be an argument, effectually to awaken us, to a sense of our high obligations, and excite us to the greatest concern to improve our time, and employ our tongues, in celebrating the praises of that God, to whose goodness and grace we are indebted, for the opportunity we still have allowed us, to sing praise to his name.—Yea, with the pious Psalmist,\* let us resolve, that we *will sing to the LORD as long as we live.* \*

SECONDLY, Is singing praises to the LORD, a duty so rational and delightful, and so essential a part of the worship of God ; hence we see the peculiar obligations we are under, for the wise provision he has

\* Psal. 104. 33.



has made, for our direction and assistance herein.—As “God hath not left himself without a witness”, respecting his providential care of the world of mankind, *in that he hath all along, done them good, and given them rain from heaven* : so neither hath he left himself without a witness, in the care of his church and people, and the religion and worship, he hath called them to observe. The gracious care of a merciful God, was early manifest in a divine revelation of his will, relative to faith and worship, and, in all succeeding ages, down to the present time, in preserving his word, in its purity, for the use and direction of his people, in both these respects, as a standing and unerring rule of both faith and worship.—That we have this word, in our own language, for our directory, is a standing proof of the divine care of the church, and of our obligations to gratitude and thankfulness.

BUT, in regard to that branch of our duty and divine worship, of which we have been speaking, we are under peculiar obligations to God, for his goodness, in providing for our direction and assistance in our attendance upon it. This constant care of a faithful God, for his church and this part of his worship, appears, more especially, in the following instances.

1<sup>st</sup>. In raising up and qualifying, in spiriting and enabling, some of his saints and servants, so faithfully and intelligibly to translate, and reduce to suitable poetical measures, the *Psalms* and various other passages of the sacred word, for the use of his church and people, in public and private, to assist in devotion, and especially in singing the praises of God —  
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Without such a work, it would scarcely have been possible, for God's church and people, in a public social way, to have attended this part of divine worship — In this we see the providence of God, in his care for the support and continuance of so delightful a part of his worship ; which demands a grateful remembrance and should be the subject of our frequent praises.

2dly ANOTHER instance of the divine care and providence, in this important affair, appears in his raising up and encouraging men, possessed of a genius for music, with great care and pains, to search out and form such an excellent system of rules, for the direction of music, in its various parts—and to compose such a variety of *Tunes*, so happily adapted, as to time, measure and harmony, to a divine use, in public worship, upon all occasions, that whole assemblies, however numerous, may join, and with one voice, as well as heart, sing praises unto God.

THIS was a work of no small importance to the devotion of the church, in this part of worship:—Yea, it was necessary ; as hereby the harmony of Zion, as to decency and engaging sweetness, as well as use, becomes more general, and is raised to higher degrees of perfection.

GOD is not the author of confusion, says the apostle—and therefore he exhorts—*Let all things be done decently, and in order.* — \* Though it is granted, that there is no such thing, as *Hotness* in one sound more than another ; yet no one can deny, that there is such a thing as *Decency* and harmony, in singing that is correct

\* 1 Cor. 14, 33, & 40.

correct and regular—or that there is such a thing as confusion and discord in singing, that is without rule and order—where every one follows the dictates of his own humor and inclination. It is, therefore necessary, that such steps should be taken and such provision made, as those but now mentioned, to assist and direct, as to matter and manner of praising God—to enable the people of God, in a manner becoming their character and his worship, to sing praises to his name.—Happy for us, and the church of God, these things are done to our hand.—And such are the helps, with which we are furnished, that by a careful improvement, the harmony of Zion, might rise to a degree of perfection, scarcely to be parallel'd by any ages past.

A *Genius* for *Poetry*—and a *Genius* for *Music*, are gifts of God.—It is of God to possess these gifts.—It is of God and under the influence of his providence and grace, that any of his servants have improved them to a divine use, and for the service of the church, and sanctuary, in these important instances.—To God our most grateful acknowledgments are due.—To God for these instances of his constant care, for his church and his worship, let our voices be raised, in grateful hymns and songs of praise.—

3dly, The preceeding discourse affords proper encouragement, to such as have improved, or are desirous of improving the means for their direction and assistance, in the divine use of music, in the worship of God. (It is, most certainly, a laudable ambition, in all, but especially in youth, of both sexes, to strive to excell, in a study so pleasant, in an art so profitable.)

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and in that, which, by divine grace, may qualify them to glorify God, in his house, to lead and assist in his service, and to shine as examples of improvement, in so delightful a part of his worship.

WE rejoice that there are any, who are engaged in so laudable a work, and who are taking those steps which may be of use to teach them, to sing praises to their God and King with understanding.—To such we would say—We *bid you* GOD *speed*—and with all our hearts, we wish you a blessing out of the house of the LORD, this day.—May you go on in improvements to higher degrees of perfection, in the devotion of the heart, as well as the music of the voices, until, by praising God in his temple here below, you shall be fully prepared, with angels round the throne and the spirits of just men made perfect, in loftier strains, to sing the praises of God and the Lamb, in his temple above, for ever and ever!—

FOURTHLY, this subject and what has been offered upon it, severely reprove the negligence of all, who have gifts and talents to enable them to sing praises to their God and King, and improve them not.

It is readily granted, that some have not talents for this external act of devotion: some, that have neither ear, voice, nor genius for music—But is it not well known, that too many that might, with decency, at least, attend and bear a part in singing praise to the LORD, who, either through pride, or bashfulness, or from some other cause, neglect it—How such can excuse themselves, or answer it to their consciences and unto that God, whose praise they



they refuse to celebrate, and whose name they neglect to glorify :—I know not—to their own master they stand or fall !—Would to God, they might be led to think seriously of their neglect, before it is too late !——But, permit me, further, to ask—Are there not some, yea, many, that are culpable, in a still higher degree, in this matter ?—Some, that not only neglect to improve, but even abuse and profane these gifts of God, to purposes of wickedness ? Is it not amazing, to observe, how pleasant and melodious the voices of many are, and how readily employed, in singing vain and foolish, if not vicious songs, to the prophaning of God's holy name; and to the depraving their minds, and debauching their morals, who, perhaps, have never once employed their tongues, to sing their great Creator's praise !—Alas, how guilty,—how inexcusable, must such appear, in the sight of that God, who searcheth all hearts,—who cannot be deceived,—who will not be mocked !——

In the church of God, under the former dispensation, there were *singing men* and *singing women*, who praised the LORD, for his goodness and for his mercy, which endureth for ever.—Why should so many, who are equally capable of this divine and delightful service, be silent in the gospel day ?—HAVE we not equal reason of praise—yea, are we not under greater obligations, to sing the praises of God and the Redeemer !—In particular, let me ask—why should there be so general a neglect of this, most agreeable and engaging part of divine worship, amongst the *Female Sex* ? Is it modesty, bash-

fulness, pride, want of attention to the nature of the duty, or want of love and reverence to the Deity?—or what is it, that prevents them from honouring God, from being ornaments to religion and shining examples of devotion?—Certainly no voices are so pleasant, none so sweetly melodious and engaging, as those of *singing women*, when rightly tun'd to hymns of praise. And shall they be the last to be persuaded to engage in a duty, for which they are the first in capacity, and for which they have the richest gifts and highest qualifications?—Have they no mercies to celebrate, no cheerful notes to raise, no joyful songs to sing, in praise of their God, their redeemer and King.——But I forbear——

MAY we all seriously recollect what has now been (imperfectly) suggested, and carefully apply it to our own souls, for awakening, quickning, encouragement and confirmation, as we find our state requires. Let all be persuaded to comply with our duty, in this part of divine worship, both in the internal devotion and external attendance, upon this divine institution.

LET those that have genius and voices for music, stir up the gift that is in them, and be awakened to improve, to the glory of God, and to the praise of his distinguishing goodness and grace.)

MAY those that have neither genius nor voices, for musical performances, be yet concerned to praise the Lord.—Many, it is to be feared, who cannot, with their voices, join the assembly, in singing praises to God, are but too apt to sit as idle spectators of the devotion of others, and suppose they have no concern in the matter. But verily, they are grossly mistaken: For they are under as much obligations to  
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the devotion of the heart, and of consequence to attend to the subject matter of the heavenly song, as if their voices were music, and the moving of their tongues was harmony itself.—It is theirs, therefore, to contemplate the hymns that are sung by others, and imbuing their spirit and adopting their sentiments, to lift their souls to God, and make melody in their hearts, to their Redeemer and King. \*

To shut up all : May we all be cautioned against resting in the form of godliness, in the outward shew of religion. If the heart is not engaged, our worship and external acts, will avail us nothing ; unless it be to enhance our guilt.—“ The LORD seeth not as man seeth : Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD on the heart.—The

LORD

\* Here it is natural to observe, that it might greatly assist the devotion of such, as cannot join the congregation, in singing, to have the books of devotion with them, and the psalm or hymns, appointed to be sung, under their eye. This would be an happy means of preserving the attention, exciting the affections, employing the meditation and enkindling devotion. Whereas, without this help, the devotion is broken. the thoughts are wandering, and the whole space employed in singing is spent to but little purpose, or wasted away in some vain amusement. And even those that do bare a part in singing, it is humbly conceived, would find no small advantage, to the same purposes, by having the psalms or hymns they sing before them—they must be more likely to enter into the true spirit of the song, and of consequence, more likely to exercise true devotion of heart.—For these, and several other reasons, It cannot but be lamented, that carrying the psalms and hymns, out of which the portion to be sung are chosen, to public worship with us, is so generally neglected. And it is earnestly recommended to all, to reform this neglect, where it has prevailed, by procuring and keeping by them, the books of devotion, for this part of worship, that are in common use.

LORD searches the hearts,—He trieth the reins.”—Our songs of praise unless attended with true devotion, *with the spirit*, as well as understanding, will be deemed no better than vain oblations, which are an offence to God. Yea, though we are ever so well skilled in music, and though the sound of our voices, in the external acts of worship, have been pleasant and engaging, as harmony itself—and though we have shone in the church, as bright examples of highest attainments in this part of divine worship, all will be in vain, if our hearts are not right in the sight of God :—Our expectations will fail, when God shall take away the soul ; and our hope shall be like the *spiders web*, which, in death, will yield us no support.—To alarm, awaken, and put us upon our guard, against a mistake so dangerous and fatal, let us be persuaded to look forward and consider how awful, how distressing it must be, at death, to change the scenes ; and from being engaged in the delightful service of *music* and singing praises with God’s people, in his temple on earth, to pass to join the haters of the LORD, in cursing and blaspheming his name in regions of despair for ever and ever !—An awful thought !— may it be deeply impressed on every heart !—

BUT are we sincere, in our devotion to God, and in praising his name ; then may we hope from praising him imperfectly on earth, to pass to sing in perfection above : and with angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and with the whole multitude of the redeemed of the LORD, to ascribe praise, and blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, to him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the lamb, forever and ever. Which God, of his infinite mercy grant, for his mercy’s sake, in Christ Jesus. *A M E N.*